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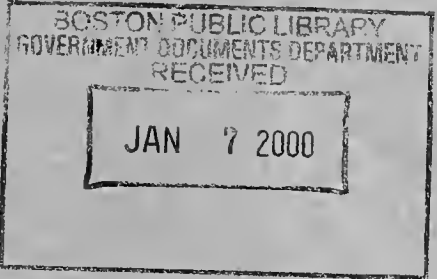
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Summary

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BOSTON'S RECREATION NEEDS

Summary Report

Boston Municipal Research Bureau  
25 Pemberton Square  
Boston 8, Massachusetts

3309

September 1955



## INTRODUCTION

Boston has a proud heritage in parks and recreation. It pioneered in the development of a comprehensive system of parks and playgrounds. It cooperated in the establishment of the country's first regional system of parks and reservations. It recognized early that there was a close affinity between parks and recreation activities and brought them together under unified management. It has always provided financial support for parks and recreation which was in line with national standards and with the outlays of comparable cities.

The evidence in this report points to the conclusion that Boston is not deriving for its people the utmost benefit from this heritage of recreation resources and from its current level of parks and recreation expenditures. Although the title in the Parks and Recreation Department implies equal status for the two functions, the emphasis within the department and the distribution of the departmental budget actually puts recreation in a subordinate status. Although strides have been made in recent years, the department's recreation program fails to meet modern concepts and standards.

There is hope in the fact that Boston need not start from scratch to regain its reputation in recreation. The foundation is sound. The report simply maps out the roads toward better organization, greater financial support, improved programming, better leadership, and more useful facilities.

An up-to-date legal framework is needed to clarify and modernize Boston's responsibilities for recreation. An internal reorganization of the Parks and Recreation Department is also needed to bring recreation up to the level of maintenance in terms of importance and recognition. A larger share of the Parks and Recreation Department's budget for recreation program and full-time personnel is the key to richer programming and improved leadership. A systematic program of modernization of outdoor and indoor facilities is the real need as far as physical resources are concerned.



## ORGANIZATION FOR PUBLIC RECREATION IN BOSTON

### Early Start - Considerable Experimentation

Boston began the development of its parks and playgrounds before the turn of the century. School Department playgrounds, in which Boston pioneered, also date back more than half a century. The Metropolitan Parks District, first regional parks and recreation experiment in the country, was set up in 1893. This long period of development and the changing emphases in recreation have led to considerable experimentation in Boston with recreation organization.

### Integration Fails

Boston tried to integrate its parks and recreation functions within a single Parks and Recreation Department as far back as 1912. This partnership of parks and recreation soon disintegrated into one of name only, however. Recreation fell behind parks maintenance, horticulture, and landscape architecture in terms of departmental importance. As a result, traditional approaches to recreation became entrenched, many of the new concepts in recreation were resisted, and the city which had pioneered in parks and playground development fell behind the progressive cities of the country in recreation program and leadership.

### Separate Board of Recreation

A movement to restore recreation to its proper place in the roster of municipal activities resulted in the appointment of a separate Board of Recreation in 1945. This was to be a central coordinating agency for recreation, rather than operational. It had one short fling at operating recreation programs and then returned to its original mission.

### Back to Integration

After having operated in more or less of a vacuum for about 10 years, the Board of Recreation was abolished in May 1954 as part of the comprehen-



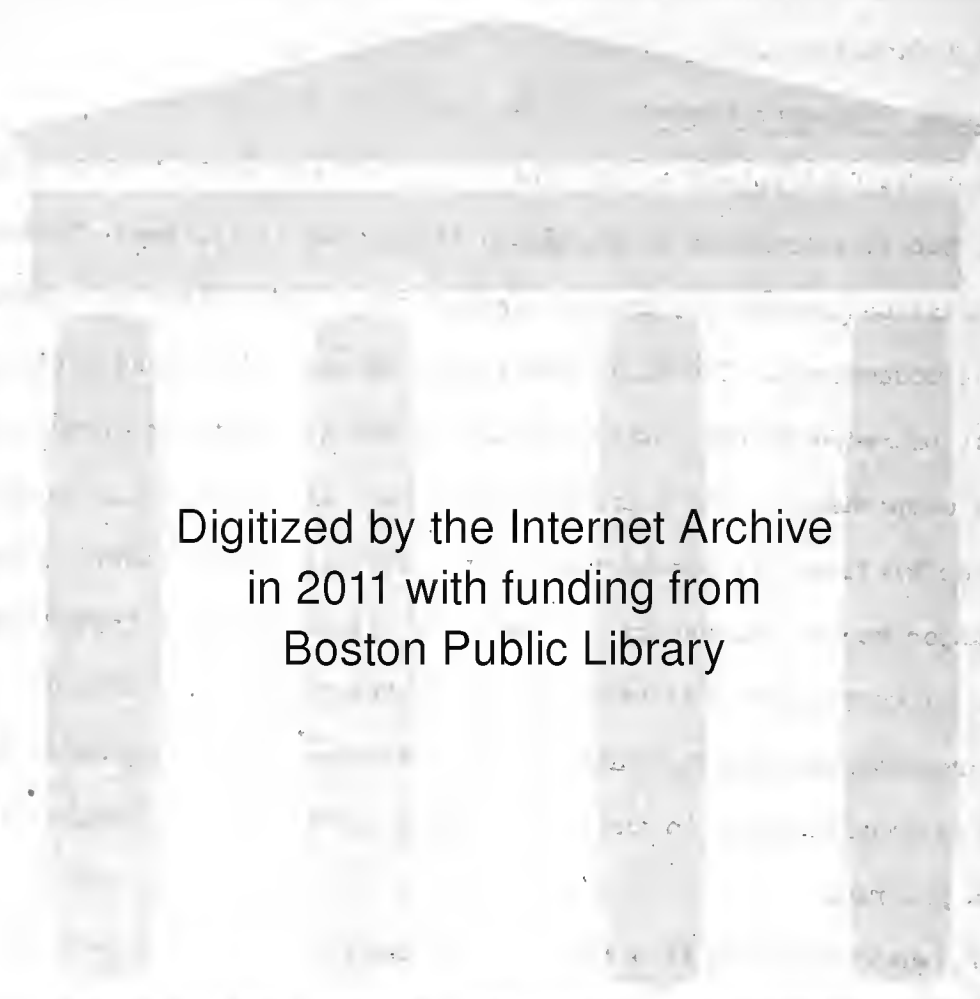
sive reorganization of City departments. A Parks and Recreation Department, under a commission headed by a paid chairman, replaced the Park Department and the Board of Recreation. The new set-up follows the pattern of unification adopted by 10 other cities in Boston's population class. It is calculated to achieve joint planning, as well as coordinated management and use of the physical facilities.

#### More Modern Legal Framework Needed

To realize the full potential of this latest reorganization and to raise the status of public recreation in Boston to its proper level, several additional steps must be taken. The present archaic legal authority for recreation should be modernized. The ordinance should be revised to make a clear-cut assignment of recreational duties, including the authority to formulate and conduct a comprehensive and coordinated program of cultural and physical recreational activities. It should pin-point the Parks and Recreation Department as the major recreation agency in the city. It should facilitate further consolidation of recreational activities now outside the jurisdiction of the Parks and Recreation Department. The new legal framework should broaden the department's responsibilities to include cultural as well as physical activities in its program.

In brief, what is needed is a clear legal mandate for public recreation, in up-to-date language, similar to that found in other large cities, emphasizing responsibility for a coordinated and comprehensive program of cultural and physical activities as well as the construction and maintenance of adequate facilities.

The proposed ordinance would authorize the Parks and Recreation Department to cooperate with the School Department, with other public agencies, and with private agencies. It would also increase the membership of the Parks and Recreation Commission from five to seven in order to extend representation to the



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United Community Services, Boston's major private organization in recreation and group work, and to the School Department.

### Better Balance through Departmental Reorganization

The internal organization of the Parks and Recreation Department should become more bilateral in character if it is to achieve truly bilateral purposes. Under the existing organization, the balance is heavily weighted on the side of development and maintenance of facilities.

There are four operating divisions, the heads of which are theoretically responsible to the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation through a Deputy Commissioner. The Deputy Commissioner spends almost all of his time, however, supervising the maintenance activities of the Parks and Recreation Department as well as the operations of the Cemetery Division. He has no responsibility for the Recreation Division. This situation means that recreation fails to receive its due share of top-side concern.

Another complicating factor is the Bath Division, which handles a hodge-podge of operation and maintenance activities, a smattering of recreational activities, and such related facilities as a sewing room and a laundry.

The proposed ordinance should provide for two major operating divisions - a maintenance division and a recreation division. To ensure appropriate leadership for the two functions, each division should be in charge of a deputy commissioner qualified in his respective field.

Swimming activities and personnel of the Bath Division should be transferred to the Recreation Division. Its remaining responsibilities should be placed under the re-constituted maintenance division.

The new divisional line-up would include an engineering division and an administrative services division as staff agencies, and two operating divisions - a recreation division and a maintenance division. The cemetery division would become a section within the maintenance division.

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## Reorganization of Recreation Division

The Recreation Division itself must be reorganized in order to elevate its status within the Parks and Recreation Department and to strengthen its operations. Permanent district administration on a year-round basis is especially needed. A district set-up in which the city is divided into about eight districts, each in charge of a district supervisor and with a general supervisor in charge of four districts, is desirable. It should be put into effect after the school playground program has been transferred to the Parks and Recreation Department, after the outdoor play program has been extended into the spring and fall seasons, and after a program for development of indoor recreation facilities is under way.

The administrative staff of the Recreation Division, which now absorbs a relatively-large proportion of manpower, would become more realistic once the division is revamped to handle the modern program outlined in a later chapter.

## Coterminous Maintenance and Recreation Districts Desirable

The Parks Division, which is responsible for the maintenance of outdoor facilities in the Parks and Recreation Department, is decentralized into eight districts, grouped within three divisions.

The divisional and district maintenance set-up seems to have been created around available headquarters buildings, not developed from any attempt to equalize maintenance workload and supervisory responsibility. The recreation and maintenance districts should be made coterminous - as is the case in Detroit and Philadelphia - when permanent recreation districts have been established. Maintenance and recreation needs within a district would then be coordinated more effectively.

## Unify the Outdoor Play Program

There is considerable overlapping and duplication of outdoor play facilities and program. This is due to the fact that outdoor play areas are supervised both by the Parks and Recreation Department and by the School Department.



Such duplication is confusing to users of the facilities as well as to the general public. It often means poor participation in a park playground because of the competition of a nearby schoolyard, or vice versa. It means that the tax dollar for outdoor play cannot be economically distributed.

Playgrounds in Boston have suffered under such divided supervision. They have been tossed back and forth from City jurisdiction to School jurisdiction, usually to bring about an ostensible reduction in one budget or the other.

An outdoor play program under the unified direction of the Parks and Recreation Department would eliminate many of the handicaps under which the schoolyards now operate. It would bring the outdoor play program under the jurisdiction of the City agency charged with promoting and conducting a comprehensive and coordinated program of recreation, with all the advantages of such unification. It would permit a better distributed system of playground facilities.

#### Grass Roots Support

One of the real weaknesses in Boston's recreation picture is the absence of unofficial organizational support for public recreation, especially at the neighborhood level.

Neighborhood committees could participate in the development of neighborhood recreation programs, could participate in the planning of new facilities, could serve as a recruiting force for volunteer leadership, and could help tie together the public and private recreation agencies in their areas. At the city level, the organization would lend general support to recreation as a function, would sponsor needed studies of the recreation problem, and would keep the Parks and Recreation Department abreast of city-wide opinion on recreation needs. Where neighborhood committees already exist, personnel of the Recreation Division serving in the neighborhoods should become active on the committees. There is only limited participation at the present time.



Where a committee does not exist, personnel of the Recreation Division should take the leadership in organizing such a committee.

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR RECREATION

### Boston's Expenditures for Parks and Recreation

Boston spent \$4.7 million in 1954 for parks and recreation purposes, or \$5.70 per capita. This is just a shade below the \$6.00 per capita generally accepted by members of the recreation profession as the standard of operating expense for parks and recreation. Boston's annual outlay for parks and recreation is evidence of generous municipal support.

Of the 18 largest cities in the country, only San Francisco and Washington, D. C. exceed Boston's operating expense for parks and public recreation. Boston also ranks third among the group of 11 large cities having combined parks and recreation departments.

### Allocation of the Parks and Recreation Department

The current consensus of professional recreation opinion is that a municipality ought to spend about half of its parks and recreation dollar for organized recreation. Of the \$3.2 million spent in 1954 by the Parks and Recreation Department for operating needs, \$1.3 million - or 40.3 per cent - went for recreation.

The allocation of expense for recreation purposes is an improvement over 1937 when a surveyor estimated the Park Department's annual outlay for recreation as one-third of its total expenditure. Closer analysis of last year's expense for recreation, however, shows that the 40 per cent figure is a very liberal estimate.

### How Much for Leadership?

The 40 per cent slice of the department's budget for recreation would be acceptable if enough of it went into leadership. Only 24.8 per cent of the department's recreation expense was allocated to leadership. This is a dis-





tinct improvement over the 10 per cent proportion estimated for 1937. If the Parks and Recreation Department were meeting the standard of the recreation profession, however, fifty per cent of its recreation expense would go toward leadership, or more than double the present amount.

#### Savings Available for Recreation

The additional funds needed to strengthen the department's recreation leadership are obtainable within the limits of the department's present budget. Savings that can be turned over to recreation purposes will become available through these moves - contraction of the public bath operations; fixing the size of the maintenance staffs for outdoor and indoor facilities at more realistic levels; transfer of certain services to MDC jurisdiction; and transfer of certain activities to the Public Works Department.

### RECREATION PROGRAM

#### Elements of Modern Recreation Program

Boston's municipal recreation program should reflect the variety of recreation interests among its population. It should run through the four seasons and should be comprehensive, adequate, and balanced.

According to the National Recreation Association every municipal recreation program should (1) provide a wide range of individual choices in different types of activities (2) serve all ages (3) provide equally for both sexes (4) encourage family recreation (5) continue throughout the year (6) include passive as well as active forms of recreation (7) be related to other recreation programs in the city (8) recognize the different tastes and interests of the individual.

#### Defects in Boston's Recreation Program

Recreation activities conducted in Boston reveal the lack of a comprehensive, balanced, and coordinated program. Although there is cooperation between recreation officials in the Parks and Recreation Department and the School De-



partment, there is little correlation of programs. The result is overlapping and duplication of program service in some districts of the city. It also results in a lack of balance in the activities offered by each agency. There is simply no formal, official way in which representatives from the two public agencies can come together to plan and carry out a comprehensive and coordinated program.

Generally, the recreation program of the Parks and Recreation Department falls far short of being a well-rounded, all-year program. The emphasis is heavy on competitive sports and physical activities. Much of the effort goes into a well-conducted and well-patronized league program in baseball, football, and basketball at the expense of intra-sectional or neighborhood participation and at the expense of a rich, diversified program for everyone.

#### Indoor Program

The indoor program of the Recreation Division is the weakest link in the year-round recreation program, although it extends throughout the longest season. The program has failed to make the recreation center the focal point for recreation in the neighborhood. It lacks variety. Gymnasium activities and athletics dominate at all centers. Generally, there is a uniform pattern of activities for all neighborhoods, despite wide differences in economic status, housing conditions, nationality backgrounds and culture in various parts of the city.

Arts and crafts, drama, music, social recreation, quiet games, and nature lore are limited or non-existent. Recreational activities are not directed at the family as a whole. There is very little opportunity for teenage co-recreational activity. Indoor program opportunities for girls and women are still narrow in scope.

Attendance figures at the 13 indoor centers for 1954-55 shows small participation compared with the possibilities. Despite the advancement of



recreation as a municipal function, the availability of more leisure time, and the addition of two more centers, participation in 1954 was less than in 1934.

Swimming is a recreational activity which is carried on under direction of the Bath Division. It should be programmed and conducted by the Recreation Division.

Greater diversity could be developed in the indoor program, not by decreasing the offerings in games and sports, but by expanding other phases of the program. As a step in this direction, experimental programs in music, drama, arts and crafts, and nature could be initiated at selected centers where neighborhood conditions indicate a considerable interest in the activity and a reasonable assurance of success.

#### Outdoor Program

The summer program of the Recreation Division in 1954 was a much richer and better balanced program than the indoor program. Activities included high and low organized games, quiet games, arts and crafts, group singing, dancing, and storytelling.

Several weaknesses are evident in the summer program also. Lack of coordination between the summer program of the School Department and the Parks and Recreation Department causes an unbalanced program of activities to be offered at some facilities. Lack of apparatus and equipment, lack of space for quiet games, and incomplete development of the area resulted in limited programs even at large facilities.

Some facilities were too small to permit anything but a limited program. Lack of indoor facilities with respect to the summer playgrounds caused the program to shut down on rainy days and on hot days. Opportunities in nature lore and dramatics were negligible. Recreation materials seemed inadequate for the conduct of an effective program.



Efforts could be made to extend the summer playground program into the spring and fall. Such a program would fill the gaps in the year-round program. Programs could be conducted during May, June, and September on a reduced schedule of operation at some of the key and better-equipped playgrounds, or wherever attendance might warrant. Any new program of this sort would have to be coordinated with a similar program now conducted by the schools.

### Competitive Sports

As mentioned earlier, the best patronized and the best organized program of the Recreation Division is the competitive sports program. Opportunities for girls and women are still limited, however. More stress could be given to a wider variety of seasonal games for both sexes. Many adaptations of seasonal field games could be offered to younger children as well.

### Special Activities

Throughout the year the Recreation Division either conducts or cooperates in many special events and activities. One of the most popular is the golden age clubs for people over 60 years of age. The present program provides entertainment for the most part. It is a good one as far as it goes. It merely scratches the surface, however, in providing activities for senior citizens.

If the indoor centers are developed as recommended, club rooms and lounge rooms could be set up so these people could meet almost daily. A program that would salvage the skills and usefulness of these people could also be set up.

More emphasis could be directed toward special activities promoting social recreation, co-recreation, and opportunities for joint family activity.

### Recent Improvements

Recreation activities conducted by the Parks and Recreation Department have shown improvement during the last few years. The competitive sports program is one of the most popular of any large city in the country. The retarded children's program at Pleasure Island is a new one which has drawn national





recognition. The public sailing program is another activity which has become increasingly popular.

#### Indoor Program of School Department

The school centers come closer to being ideal public community recreation centers than the indoor centers operated by the Parks and Recreation Department. The program offers a greater variety of indoor activities, but fails to reach all age groups. Since the program operates in the evening and only twice a week, it is confined to young adults and adults.

There are other shortcomings in the program. Very few of the centers have rooms that may be used as general game rooms, social rooms, or lounge rooms. Many of the older buildings are not adapted to the purpose of community centers.

The sharp decline in attendance since 1948 and the high costs of operating the centers substantiate the need for reexamining the school center program.

Operation at least four days a week between 3 p.m. and 10 p.m. would extend the program to all ages, provide more continuity to the clubs formed, and improve participation.

#### Outdoor Program of School Department

The School Department's playground program suffers from small area of play space. It is limited to children up to 14 years of age and in some districts overlaps other public programs.

#### Obstacles to Good Programming

Several obstacles stand in the way of good recreation programming in Boston. Firstly, as already mentioned, there is no specific legal responsibility in a single agency to conduct a comprehensive recreation program. Secondly, municipal buildings used by the Parks and Recreation Department as recreation centers are not well-designed for that purpose. Finally, most of the recreation leadership is not trained in the modern concepts of recreation service.



## PERSONNEL

### Good Leadership Essential

Leadership is perhaps the most important single factor in achieving an effective recreation program. Creative, trained, and intelligent leaders are essential to secure a good return on the city's investment in recreation areas and facilities; to furnish citizens with satisfying recreation activities; to assure a program that will get public approval and support.

### General Personnel Deficiencies

As pointed out in the section on program, Boston puts a great deal of emphasis on competitive sports and physical activities. In general, it is below standard in program content, especially in activities of a cultural variety. There is little doubt that a major factor for this condition is the number, training, and qualifications of full-time leadership.

The Department of Parks and Recreation has made a distinct effort in recent years to improve the quality of its personnel. It still does not have a well-rounded staff, however, capable of conducting a full-fledged, modern recreational program. There is a lack of well-trained, well-qualified personnel at the leader's level, especially with regard to the non-athletic forms of recreation, such as music, dramatics, arts and crafts, and nature study. There is a lack of well-qualified personnel at the supervisor's level to organize activities on a district basis and to secure community cooperation.

There are neither permanent personnel nor part-time people (except during playground season) assigned as specialists to dramatics, music, arts and crafts, or nature study. According to nationally-recognized standards, communities as large as Boston should have specialists in all or several of these areas either on a full-time basis or on a part-time basis.

### Special Personnel Problems

There are several personnel difficulties in the Recreation Division. In



some cases, employees are working out of title. In other cases, more employees are being used in a particular classification than the recreation program requires. Thirdly, a relatively-large group of outmoded positions is a poor substitute for badly-needed recreation leadership.

Two other factors - high age ratio and physical incapacities - add to the personnel problem. The average age for all employees is 50, while several staff members are suffering from disabilities of one kind or another. These factors should provide several opportunities for staff replacements in a few years. High standards must be set in recruiting for vacated positions.

### Training and Background

The permanent personnel in the Recreation Division show a variety of backgrounds and training. Some have only limited training; some show no training at all. A few have excellent backgrounds. Some have made the transition to modern recreational concepts through self-development. Too many, however, remain untrained. That many do a good job, notwithstanding their limited training, cannot be denied.

In general, however, the limited training and narrow backgrounds are a major factor behind the City's failure to achieve a level of recreation service commensurate with the input of time, effort, and funds.

### Qualification Standards

The qualification standards used in recruiting recreation instructors reflect somewhat the calibre of personnel in the Recreation Division. As recently as January 1952, when the last Civil Service examination for recreation instructor (then called physical instructor) was held, recreation concepts in Boston were still dominated by physical activities. The poster advertising the examination listed duties which contrasted strikingly with the standards for similar positions set up by the National Recreation Association. Clearly, the answer lies in using the standards of the NRA as the guide for



raising the standards for recreation instructor in Boston.

NRA standards should also be used for raising the standards for recreation supervisor in Boston. Several positions of recreation supervisor should be vacant shortly. If the City embarks on a recreation program of wider scope and assumes some of the recreation functions now handled by the School Department, the importance of the supervisory positions will be greatly increased.

#### Expenditures for Personnel

Several facts help to explain the recreation personnel handicaps in Boston. In 1954, the City spent only 64 cents per capita for recreation leadership. The Boston figure includes the costs for leadership of both the Parks and Recreation Department and the School Committee. On an inter-city basis, Boston ranked ninth among the 15 comparable cities for which data was available.

The Parks and Recreation Department spent only 17.6 per cent of its total personnel expenditures for recreation leadership in 1954. Again on an inter-city basis, Boston ranked sixth among the nine cities with combined parks and recreation departments.

#### Number of Personnel

Boston has only 52 year-round personnel (including five swimming instructors) to conduct its public recreation program. Out of a total departmental staff of 707 (as of February 1, 1955) only 52, or 7.4 per cent, are engaged in recreation. On a comparative basis, Boston's ratio of one leader per 15,412 of population ranks the city next to last for the 17 cities compared. The City does better in numbers of part-time personnel, providing one for every 1278 of population. In this respect the City ranks second.

Worthwhile as it is to have a large number of part-time personnel, effective recreation service rests primarily upon the number of year-round leaders who are especially trained for recreation and who are giving their entire time to recreation service. Clearly, to present a richer program of activities.





Boston needs to work toward a larger number of full-time personnel.

### Salaries

Salaries paid for recreation leadership in Boston are far below average. Boston ranks near the bottom in compensation for recreation personnel among the reporting cities with over 500,000 population. The relatively-low salary scales for recreation personnel are obstacles to the attraction and retention of professionally-trained, experienced people. Before any revisions are made in the wage structure for recreation personnel, however, the standards used in recruiting must be raised considerably.

### In-Service Training

In Boston, where few workers have formal recreation training, the need for an in-service training program is great.

A comprehensive program of in-service training should be developed by the Recreation Division to keep leaders abreast of changing trends in program or leadership techniques. Among the methods that could be feasibly used to accomplish in-service training are institutes and staff meetings.

### Pre-Service Training

The playground leader's institute is a brief training course conducted by the Recreation Division just before the summer season opens. It tries to cover in two days the content of a playground training program recommended by the National Recreation Association. The value of even a two-day institute was reflected in the higher standard of playground service carried on during 1954.

### Volunteer Leadership

Another area of personnel in which Boston falls down is in volunteer leadership. Volunteers are necessary to help increase the diversity and extent of the program.

They can be recruited from many sources. Neighborhood committees on recreation would be natural sources for recruitment. College student volunteers



could be secured through interviews arranged with local university authorities. Recreation supervisors could personally contact individuals in their neighborhoods or appeal to neighborhood organizations.

#### Recent Improvements in Personnel

The Recreation Division, aware of its personnel problem, has made recent efforts to raise the standards of its leadership. One of the most forward steps was in the method of hiring and training summer playground leaders in 1953 and 1954. Unfortunately, the progress made in this respect during that time was set back considerably by the recruiting procedure adopted in 1955. The screening procedure based on experience, training, and ability was abandoned in favor of one based almost entirely upon political sponsorship.

Attempts to overcome the lack of permanent leadership for women's and girls' activities have been made by hiring part-time women leaders.

A well-qualified, full-time supervisor to organize girls' activities is another major improvement.

#### Recreation Leadership in Schools

Summer playground leaders for the School Department for 1955 were selected from a list established by examination given by the Board of Examiners of the School Department.

Managers of school centers are appointed yearly by the School Committee. There are no formally-adopted standards for hiring them. Leaders are also appointed yearly by the School Committee. Again there are no formally-adopted standards for selection; but, in general, leaders have been appointed for ability to lead and promote an activity.

#### BOSTON'S OUTDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES

Boston has a variety of outdoor recreational resources in the form of playgrounds, playfields, community parks, reservations, beaches, and swimming pools. There are over 3000 acres of park and recreation areas under public



control in the city. Outside the city limits are 10,500 more acres of park and recreation area under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan District Commission and 700 acres of park land owned by the Trustees of Public Reservations. These resources are reasonably accessible to Boston residents.

#### Standards for Total Parks and Recreation Space

On the face of it, Boston's 3171 acres of parks and recreation space is far below a nationally-recognized standard of one acre per 100 people. If the 10,500 acres in MDC facilities are added, however - these areas are within 11 miles from the center of the city - Boston comes close to the national standard for total parks and recreation space.

If parks and recreation space is measured in terms of a proportion of land area - 10 per cent is the standard from this point of view - Boston's total parks and recreation area reaches the target.

#### Standards for Play Areas

Standards prescribed by the City Planning Board in its Preliminary General Plan of 1950 are used as the guides in measuring the adequacy of a district in play areas.

No general observations can be made on the extent to which Boston meets the standards on distance of playgrounds and playfields from the homes of users. Shortcomings in individual districts are pointed out in Appendix A of the full report.

As for the standards on minimum size for playgrounds and playfields, about 40 per cent of the playgrounds under control of the Parks and Recreation Department and the Metropolitan District Commission fall below the minimum requirement of one-half acre. Furthermore, many playgrounds, both junior and senior, do not meet layout and equipment requirements. About one-third of the 82 supervised schoolyards are below the half-acre standard for size. Few of them meet the barest requirements of design and equipment.



There are 26 play areas which qualify in size as playfields. In several, some of the necessary elements of a full-fledged playfield are missing. Four lie undeveloped.

There are two standards on acreage of play area in terms of population. One measures total space in terms of total population. The other measures total space in terms of child population. The first standard is one acre of play area (playgrounds and playfields together) for every 1470 of total population. The second standard is one acre for every 260 residents between the ages of 6 and 15.

On the basis of the first standard, Boston should have 542 acres of play space; on the basis of the second standard, it would need 401 acres of play space. When supervised schoolyards are included, the City's total play area runs to 612 acres, which is above either standard.

It must be emphasized that although Boston meets city-wide standards on total play space, several of its districts show glaring inadequacies. In some districts, the poor distribution of play area leaves large groups of people unserved. In a few districts, some of the space needs development.

When playfields are considered separately, the standard is one-and-one-sixth acres per 1000 of total population. On this basis, Boston would require 900-odd acres of playfields, or about two-and-one-half times its existing total of 354 acres. Boston's seemingly-large deficiency is not so serious. There are some 25 playground facilities with areas ranging from three to seven acres, each of which really functions as a playfield.

#### Recommendations in General Plan of 1950

In its 1950 preliminary report on the General Plan for Boston, the City Planning Board developed a long-range blueprint for playground and playfield facilities. In this report, the City Planning Board pointed out that Boston would have to add 62 junior and 19 senior playgrounds while enlarging 52





junior playgrounds and nine senior playgrounds. It also recommended five new playfields and the enlargement of three existing playfields.

The City Planning Board recommended, as capital improvement policy, the development each year of one new large play area and three areas of junior size, or the extension of an equivalent number of existing facilities.

#### Interpreting the Record

The record during the 1949-1954 period shows that the number of large and small play areas developed and the total acreage added through both City and MDC construction is generally in line with the established guide. But putting the facilities where they will do the most good in the district is as important as providing sufficient recreation area for the district. In most cases, the MDC-developed facilities did not fit the exact needs of the districts involved. They are too close to existing play areas or are not located within neighborhoods requiring additional recreation facilities. Furthermore, most of the small play areas constructed since 1949 did not meet the minimum size of half-an-acre.

#### Policy on Tot Lots

Putting City funds into tot lots for some of the congested sections of Boston was probably unavoidable in the past. Redevelopment of these sections, which would provide opportunities for constructing recreation facilities of more-standard size and character, was too far off. There was no equivalent excuse, however, for the construction of tot lots in the suburban areas of Boston with MDC funds.

For the future, tot lots should not be built by the Parks and Recreation Department or by the Metropolitan District Commission. They are of limited usefulness; the funds expended for them would achieve greater benefits if put into facilities of more standard size. If tot lots are badly needed in a particular area, the nearest schoolyard can be equipped with



the apparatus typical of a tot lot.

#### Park Area into Play Space Commendable

Use of available park areas for play space is being done more and more in Boston, especially in sections with a scarcity of vacant land. In some cases, it merely recognizes the unorganized use of park land for recreation by providing the needed apparatus and development. Extension of this policy wherever possible is highly desirable.

#### Toward Better Location of MDC Facilities in Boston

There is a desperate need for coordinating the planning and construction of MDC play areas for Boston with existing City-owned facilities and with future recreation needs. Construction and maintenance of MDC recreation areas is paid for through an annual assessment levied on members of the Metropolitan Parks District; and Boston pays about 40 per cent of the cost. Mistakes have already been made in locating MDC facilities in Boston. The most recent example is the tot lot constructed in Hyde Park on Reservation Road near Brainard Street, a clear-cut duplication of the children's area of the Smith's Pond playground, which is only a stone's throw from the MDC facility.

#### Coordination Needed

Parks and Recreation Department officials are not always advised of projected MDC play facilities so that they may be integrated into City plans for the area involved.

To insure that future MDC playgrounds in Boston fit into the City's own plans, officials of the Parks and Recreation Department should consult with MDC authorities well in advance of project planning. Recent legislation directing the MDC to construct and maintain playgrounds, beach areas, skating rinks, and other recreational facilities from a million-dollar bond issue makes this recommendation even more urgent. Boston would derive ultimate benefit from its share of the cost if new facilities or improvements within the



city conformed to district needs as detailed in Appendix A of the full report.

### City Use of MDC Facilities

The City's Director of Recreation should look over MDC-owned play areas in Boston and request their use for the Park and Recreation Department's supervised recreation program in districts where space for supervision is needed and where the facilities meet the requirements of the department. The Charlesbank play area and the Readville Street playground are typical of the MDC facilities which would fit nicely into Boston's supervised recreation program. Planned MDC playgrounds on River Street in South Dorchester, on Truman Highway in Hyde Park, and at Camp Meigs in the Readville district of Hyde Park would also be more useful under recreation leadership furnished by the City.

### Better Distribution through Unified Organization

A better distribution of supervised play areas could be achieved by transferring to the Parks and Recreation Department the schoolyard recreation program conducted by the School Department, as already recommended. Under unified direction, the best-located and best-equipped of all the available facilities could be chosen to secure a well-balanced system of supervised areas throughout the whole city.

### Qualitative Appraisal of Outdoor Recreation Facilities

Good design, modern development and equipment, modernization of older areas, and good maintenance are also important if a municipality is to have a really useful recreation plant.

### Properties of the Parks and Recreation Department

Parks and play areas under control of the Parks and Recreation Department have grown up over a period of some 75 years. As a result of this long period of development, Boston's outdoor resources in recreation show many variations in design, construction, and condition.



Some areas which date as far back as 50 or 60 years indicate keen imagination and insight in recreation design. The landscape architects who guided the development of these early facilities for play included many features which are still abreast of modern recreation area design.

#### Deficiencies in Design and Maintenance

Other areas, however, are poor in original design or show the need for modernization. Some sites were faulty. Large sections of many facilities lie undeveloped. The surfaces of many facilities are dirt or gravel, which are hardly conducive to most types of play. Many apparatus areas for children have neither finished surfaces nor turf. Many of the playfields or larger playgrounds lack separate facilities for pre-school children and for children of junior age groups. Some areas lack apparatus and equipment; many do not have enough apparatus and equipment. Many of the smaller play areas and play lots show the toll taken by vandalism and the results of substandard maintenance. Unused tennis courts in many areas are weed-ridden; only in a few facilities have poorly-used tennis courts been replaced with more popular uses. Few outdoor areas have separate space for the aged.

By and large, playground design is dominated by an emphasis on organized athletics. The newer influences in playground design, which add the features of kindergarten or pre-school facilities and the characteristics of the kiddie lands in amusements parks, are beginning to appear, but on a very limited scale.

The larger play areas constructed in recent years are improvements over the older designs. But modernization goes on in a piece-meal fashion. The design limitations which persist reflect the narrowness in recreation program, the extreme emphasis on organized athletics, and the failure to recognize that facilities must keep abreast of changing concepts in recreation program.

#### Other Conclusions

Several additional conclusions stem from the analysis of design, con-





struction, and condition of outdoor facilities. The Director of Recreation, who is the administrative head of the recreation program, should participate in all issues of design and construction at all stages of development. The development of play areas needs the advice and counseling of the person in charge of the program itself. Secondly, the neglect of certain facilities and the poor condition of other facilities shows the need for a program of preventive maintenance. Thirdly, the quality of care was particularly low in areas which do not have permanent maintenance personnel assigned because of their small size. That these facilities do not receive regular attention is mainly a problem of sensible distribution of custodial personnel.

#### Expenditures for Playground Improvements

Boston has spent a considerable amount of money in recent years for playground improvements. Most of it, however, has gone into rehabilitation, deferred maintenance, and construction of new tot lots. A relatively insignificant amount has been spent on modernization - on the full development of all available space on play facilities; on the development of separate areas for pre-school children and of separate areas for elementary school children on the larger facilities; on the addition of multiple-use areas to existing facilities; on spray showers; and on modern apparatus and equipment.

What Boston needs is a systematic program of modernization, along the lines of the work now being done in Philadelphia. This modernization should begin with the larger areas, especially the playfields. The Philadelphia experiment shows what modernization can do for program and participation.

#### School Department Properties

Since the idea of using outdoor school areas for recreation came as an afterthought to design of the school site in most cases, few of the facilities used by the School Department for playgrounds meet modern standards of design. Most of the schoolyards have little or no shade. Apparatus or equipment at



some facilities is totally inadequate. Many need markings for court games. The typical schoolyard is too small for real recreation value.

#### Properties of the Metropolitan District Commission

The play lots in Boston under control of the Metropolitan District Commission are all of recent construction. They are not as traditional in design as the City-owned play lots of the same vintage. Apparatus and equipment installed on the MDC areas reflect the newer recreational concepts. The larger play areas developed by the MDC also reflect modern tastes in layout and equipment.

#### Conclusion

Boston hardly suffers from an insurmountable problem of adequate recreation facilities. With a few exceptions, the problem is rather to make fuller and better use of existing space while correcting deficiencies through the development schedule recommended by the City Planning Board. A systematic program of modernization plus the adoption of the suggestions previously made on outdoor facilities are the keys to efficient utilization of recreation resources.

#### BOSTON'S INDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES

An up-to-date system of recreation resources includes a sensibly-distributed network of indoor as well as outdoor facilities. Many recreation activities of a year-round nature require buildings of one kind or another. Buildings are also essential as adjuncts of outdoor facilities.

#### City-Wide Quantitative Measurement

According to the National Recreation Association a city should have a general recreation building or an indoor recreation center available for use throughout the year for at least every 20,000 people.

Even if the 28 municipal buildings and schools used for organized recreation are classified as general recreation buildings or indoor recreation



centers - analysis of the design and use of the facilities indicates that this is hardly the case - Boston fails to meet the quantitative standard.

Some of the deficiency is made up by the availability of so many privately-supported centers. The rest of the deficiency can be made up by greater use of additional school buildings for recreation purposes, by remodeling larger field houses as small indoor recreation centers, and by conversion to recreation use of other public buildings not needed for their original purposes.

#### District Quantitative Measurement

Nine districts of the city fail to meet the quantitative standard. Three districts - Back Bay, West Roxbury, South Dorchester - do not have a single publicly-sponsored recreation center. Privately-operated recreation facilities are also scarce in these three sections.

Of the six other districts, Brighton and North Dorchester are farthest away from meeting the standard.

#### Municipal Buildings as Recreation Facilities

The municipal buildings in Boston used for recreation purposes are all very similar. Whether operated by the Real Property Department or the Parks and Recreation Department, the typical municipal building is a two-or three-story structure in which the gymnasium and shower facilities are the key elements. Some of the buildings also have auditoria or combined gymnasium-auditoria.

The Gymnasium. The gymnasium is the principal recreation facility in 13 of the 14 municipal buildings used for recreation. In fact, the gymnasium is the area around which almost the entire recreation program revolves.

Gymnasias vary in size from one building to another. Some are large enough to permit several uses at the same time. Others have small areas which impede multiple use.



The Auditorium. The potentialities of the auditoria for public recreation purposes have hardly been scratched. The Recreation Division used them very infrequently in connection with the indoor program in 1954.

Use of the auditoria for private purposes is very limited. Only the J. J. Williams building auditorium and the Brighton auditorium get any substantial outside use.

The City would suffer no great loss of revenue from private use of the auditoria if there were greater use made of auditoria for organized recreation.

#### Deficiencies in Municipal Buildings

Municipal buildings vary in age, condition, and standards of cleanliness. Most of them are 40 or 50 years old. Some are poorly lighted, while others need painting or other structural repairs.

No municipal building has the separate areas - social rooms, lounge room, arts and crafts rooms, and multiple use rooms - which are part of an ideal indoor recreation plant. Almost every one of the buildings, however, has available space which can be converted into such areas.

#### Modernize Existing Facilities

Boston should undertake a remodeling program. It should begin in areas where there is a lack of sufficient indoor recreation facilities - public or private - and in buildings which do not require extensive physical changes.

The Brighton municipal building would be a natural for conversion into a genuine indoor recreation center. The space in the building lends itself readily to conversion. Brighton is one of the poorest-served districts of the city in terms of available recreation buildings. The record of use of the shower facilities and auditorium in the Brighton building points to waste of valuable public property. The net cost per shower in 1953 ran to almost \$2.50.

A similar opportunity for remodeling a municipal building exists in Charlestown.





Tobin Memorial, which represents a failure to fully use a recently-constructed building, could be remodeled and equipped inexpensively for recreation. The basement floor was originally planned for active games, but nothing has been done along these lines as yet.

The exact design of these projects should rest with the Chief Engineer and the Director of Recreation. Designs of converted and new recreation centers in other cities would yield helpful ideas.

#### Caution in Conversion

Remodeling of other municipal buildings should await the completion of the projects suggested above. The Recreation Division must gather experience in conducting varied indoor programs before it embarks on a city-wide system of indoor centers. Before a remodeling project is undertaken, the availability of indoor centers in the particular district should be explored. Neighborhood groups should participate in remodeling planning.

#### Recommended Changes in Jurisdiction

Several municipal buildings under the jurisdiction of the Real Property Department are used almost exclusively by the Parks and Recreation Department. When the buildings in Brighton and Charlestown are remodeled as real recreation buildings, they should be transferred to the jurisdiction of the Parks and Recreation Department. Coordination of program and maintenance activities would improve under the unified direction of a single department.

#### School Buildings as Recreation Facilities

Most of the buildings used in the School Department's extended use program were not originally designed to provide separate community center facilities. Thus, although they contain many ingredients of a general recreation building, and although the programs carried on in the school resemble modern indoor recreation programs, they are far from ideal recreation facilities.

School buildings, however, are valuable supplements as space for indoor



recreation and should continue to be used as such. In fact, there are many school buildings which have gymnasias and/or auditoria which are adaptable for recreation use.

#### Other Possibilities for Indoor Recreation

Boston has 50 shelter or field houses which vary in size and condition but which offer possibilities as indoor recreation centers for certain districts.

Some districts which lack indoor recreation facilities, or which need smaller indoor centers to supplement their main units, could be served by field houses remodeled along the lines of Philadelphia's experience.

Other possibilities for indoor recreation centers include abandoned fire stations and school buildings.





